



www.merf.org

MERF News

January 2025



Middle East Reformed Fellowship—“Declaring the Whole Counsel of God”

“Faithful, Fruitful and Cost-Effective Indigenous Missions!”

Suffering Christian Minorities

هَنِيئًا لِلْمَطْرُودِينَ مِنْ أَجْلِ الْحَقِّ، لِأَنَّ لَهُمْ مَلَكَوَتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ.
(عيسى المسيح)

**“Blessed are those
who are persecuted
for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Matthew 5:10

www.issa-almasih.com

From the beginning of the 20th century, eastern Mediterranean and western Asian lands have been dramatically impacted by the constant ebb and flow of international geopolitical tensions. Religious and ethnic divisions have repeatedly led to civil conflicts and proxy wars, bringing chaos and suffering to tens of millions, especially to Christian minorities.

Armenian & Assyrian Christians

Early in the century, joint action by Ottoman Turks and Kurdish militias carried out ethnic and religious cleansing

and genocide. One and half million Armenian Christians were massacred, along with several hundred thousand Assyrian Christians. Also, hundreds of Armenians were deported from Asia Minor to the Syrian desert of Deir-ez-Zor to face exposure and starvation. Then, in 1948 tens of thousands of Christians lost their homes and livelihood in Palestine, including Armenian refugees from Anatolia who had fled there.

Iraqi Christians

In the later part of the 20th century, 12 years of sanctions against Iraq

caused the whole population much deprivation, followed by its invasion. This led to the toppling of the secular Iraqi government, under which the Christian minority had enjoyed much freedom and protection. Various Islamists took power, Christians and other minorities faced horrors and hostilities. The vast majority of the Iraqi Christian population (about 2 million) lost everything. Most escaped over the borders to Syria and Jordan, becoming refugees. Others fled to Christian villages in northern Iraq. In the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, the large Evangelical/Reformed congregation

once had over twelve hundred members, but now there are less than one hundred.

Syria

A few weeks ago, regional and international geopolitical efforts have also caused the sudden collapse of the secular Syrian government. Longstanding western sanctions against Syria and confiscation of its natural and financial resources severely weakened the government and impoverished most of the population. Strong external economic, military and logistical support readied Islamic Jihadists to take advantage of the

situation. Although relatively small in numbers, Islamist groups previously affiliated with Al-Qaeda and ISIS and still listed internationally as terrorists, quickly swept through Syria from northern and southern neighbouring countries. Shockingly, weary secular Syrian government armed forces and security personnel, weakened and demoralized, showed no serious resistance. Evidently, bribed top generals gave orders to walk away or surrender. Those who resisted were shot dead on the spot.

So, the Islamic Jihadists speedily seized power, proclaiming themselves the new government and Syria a Sunni Islamic state to be strictly ruled by Islamic "Sharia" law. A new governmental decree forbids the use of non-Islamic terms in all official government documents. In fact, now the exclusive use of 14-century old Koranic public greetings is imposed. Within a few days, the newly-established Jihadist Syrian Ministry of Education announced plans for an Islamic curriculum for all schools and educational institutions, both public and



private.

Syrian Christians

About 15% of the Syrian population are professing Christians. Until the beginning of the 21st century, they numbered close to two million. Harsh economic sanctions imposed by the West, causing the whole population to suffer, has led most to immigrate to other countries. At least three hundred thousand Syrian Christians remain. Shock and fear fell on the predominantly Christian small towns, and villages. In major Syrian cities, in a show of force, armed Islamists patrolled the streets of

Christian neighbourhoods. In some remote towns, they entered and occupied historic church buildings. They burned Christmas trees and destroyed Christmas decor. Some armed men were heard announcing intentions to turn churches into mosques. Some Christians have shown much courage by standing as unarmed guards of church buildings.

It is still unclear what will become of Syrian Christians. Many wonder whether they will be allowed freedom of worship or to keep their jobs. *What is clear is the most urgent need for earnest*

prayer.

Many Syrian Christians, mostly young people, have escaped across the border to Lebanon to seek refuge in predominantly Christian areas. This includes hundreds of evangel-

gical believers. MERF already partners with Lebanese church volunteers to provide diaconal aid to the neediest displaced southern Lebanese Christian families. Naturally this will be extended to needy Syrian refugees.

Recent events in Syria point again to the strategic importance of MERF's Arabic radio and online ministry which brings the gospel to Syria and the 22 nations of the Arab League. A few months ago, T.M. a Christian teacher from Homs, central Syria expressed her gratitude for this ministry:

"...I thank God for your wise and winsome presentation of our blessed gospel. I regularly pray for you all and for the work of the Holy Spirit in minds and hearts of many who hear and read these wonderful messages...I once overheard two Muslim colleagues discussing a saying of Christ which they read on one of the sites..."

MERF-England & Wales
 103 Merewood Avenue, Headington, Oxford,
 OX3 8EQ www.give.net/MERF

MERF-Ireland
 (charity no. 103181) 246 Vow Road, Rasharkin,
 Ballymena BT44 8TB www.give.net/20221778

MERF-Scotland
 1 MacAdam Way, Dalmellington, East Ayrshire
 KA6 7FD Scotland UK www.give.net/20035868

International Evangelical Church
 Sundays 10:30 am & 6:00 pm – John Calvin Centre
 57 Stylianou Lena St., Larnaca, Cyprus